

VZCZCXRO7648  
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHDM #0147/01 0451355  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 141355Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2968  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RHMCSUU/FAA NATIONAL HQ WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0225

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 000147

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NEA/ELA  
EB/TRA/OTP FOR KRISTIN GUSTAVSON AND WIN DAYTON  
COMMERCE FOR TONY CHRISTINO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2017  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ETTC](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES SPEAKS TO CHARGE ON AIR SAFETY

REF: 06 DAM 1811

Classified By: CDA Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.5 b/d

11. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 10.

12. (C) Summary. Responding to a request by the Syrian MFA and seeking to fill-in missing information on important safety of flight issues, Charge met, February 8, with the DG of Syrian Arab Airlines (SAA) to discuss concerns over the deteriorated safety condition of SAA,s airplanes. The SAA managers asked for USG intervention to speed spare parts licensing to allow SAA to maintain necessary safety of flight while complying with U.S. laws. This official request for assistance on safety of flight licenses (something that can be permitted under the Syria Accountability Act) leads post to propose that it is time for the USG to take one of two courses of action: either a) expeditiously move on the 13 license requests pending since early 2006 and address with Boeing the fact that it is legal to provide technical safety information to SAA, or b) move expeditiously to issue a public warning to Americans that SAA is no longer safe to fly. End Summary.

13. (SBU) For the first time since his arrival August 1, the Syrian MFA asked the Charge to meet with a SARG official -- in this case the Director General of Syrian Arab Airlines (SAA), Nachaat Numir. Given our failed efforts to get a lower level appointment with SAA over the past months to gain updated information on the safety status of aircraft in the SAA fleet, the Charge met Numir and a number of his staff members, including his technical director Mohiedoin Issa and Issa,s deputy, Youssef Al Hoshe, on February 8. Numir explained that SAA is suffering a deteriorating safety situation because of its lack of access to spare parts, air safety bulletins, and technical consultation on its Boeing aircraft: two 747s and six 727s; only two of the latter are currently flying.

14. (SBU) According to Numir, SAA,s problems with acquiring needed spare parts began with the implementation of the Syrian Accountability Act in May 2004 when processing times for applications went from three-to-six weeks to as long as three months. Still, SAA was able to adapt to the three-month waiting time, in part, by better anticipating needs and necessary maintenance, said Numir. Since January of 2006, however, no U.S. licenses have been approved for spare parts, according to Numir. Numir commented that the lack of parts is seriously impacting the airworthiness of the SAA,s fleet, especially its Boeings. He also noted that

some Airbus parts containing ten percent or more U.S. content are difficult to obtain. As an example of how SAA has been frustrated in acquiring even mandated safety equipment, Numir stated that France had recently banned SAA's two Boeing 747s from flying to Paris because of the lack of a ground proximity radar. Numir underlined that US authorities made the radar mandatory after 9/11. Numir commented that despite France's ban of the 747s, the same planes were flying all other SAA routes, including to other European cities.

¶15. (SBU) Numir commented to the Charge that parts needed by the SAA are available on the black market. Numir specified that SAA representatives had been approached by black marketers in both Singapore and Dubai who offered to supply SAA with all of its needs, but he had declined any business relationship with illicit dealers.

¶16. (SBU) Numir complained that recently Boeing has stopped providing SAA with its quarterly service bulletin, which according to Numir specifies necessary safety related developments and advice. Numir commented that even worse from SAA's perspective, Boeing had also recently stopped responding to SAA's technical queries. Numir related the example of an unspecified SAA plane that had recently suffered a crack in the metal covering one of its wings. SAA maintenance staff attempted to consult with the appropriate Boeing technical experts on whether their planned repairs were appropriate. Boeing refused any contact citing USG sanctions under the Syria Accountability Act as precluding any collaboration, said Numir.

¶17. (SBU) The assembled SAA managers commented to the Charge that the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that

DAMASCUS 00000147 002 OF 002

SAA's safety was seriously impacted. One manager commented that SAA had not had an air safety accident in its 60 years and had as its motto "SAA means safety.<sup>8</sup> He feared that if current trends held, an incident would become increasingly likely. The Charge queried Numir on the current status of SAA's collaboration with ICAO to identify the airline's shortcomings and explore ways to ameliorate them (reftel). Numir commented that little progress has been made since an ICAO representative visited Washington in July, but that both SAA and Syria's civil aviation authority would welcome future technical assistance from ICAO.

¶18. (SBU) The Charge commented that the dire safety concerns outlined by the SAA managers called into question SAA's airworthiness. He noted the USG had a particular responsibility for the safety of American citizens and embassy staff who might use SAA. The Charge opined that the continuing deterioration in the safety of SAA's airplanes could cause the USG to issue a warning to American citizens cautioning them against flying SAA in the future.

¶19. (C) As the Department reviews Syrian aviation matters, we offer the following perspective. SAA remains an attractive option for many travelling to or from Damascus because of its convenient routing and because its prices are below its competitors. Post wants to ban its own staff and the associated American school from using SAA but is concerned about the "no double standard rule." We have, therefore, been advocating a public statement on SAA for some time now. Now that SAA management has raised its safety concerns directly with us, and understanding that the interagency has yet to come up with a decision on what to do about license requests, we recommend the Department act on the Syrian Airlines issue. If the Department decides to pursue a public statement, we now have access to the senior levels of SAA to answer any questions regarding flight safety necessary to make this determination. We note that a public statement on SAA would likely draw a negative reaction from the SARG and such a decision should be factored into the overall context of our bilateral relationship. While safety-of-flight licenses and limited technical assistance may not address all

of the safety issues with SAA's ageing Boeing aircraft, if we do not wish to make a public statement, we should move expeditiously to either approve or disapprove the outstanding licenses that the intra-agency has been grappling with since last year. If the Department decides to move on processing the licenses, we should carefully consider how to factor what will be considered a positive sign by the SARG into our efforts to gain SARG cooperation on bilateral issues.

¶10. (C) Action Request: Post requests the Department take the necessary steps to either approve eligible safety of flight license requests or begin the process to issue a public statement on our concerns over SAA safety.  
CORBIN